

**"Transcend the Ordinary"**

Adar - Iyar 5784  
March - May 2024

## CANTOR'S MESSAGE

By CANTOR SHARON BERNSTEIN



In the very beginning, on the first day of creation, God said: "Let there be light"; and there was light. Three days later, on the fourth day, God created the sun, moon, and stars. It is three days – three whole days – from the moment light is created until the celestial bodies that make light are created. Somehow, between the first and the fourth day, there was light, but not yet that which actually makes physical light in the world. How is that? What is this light that existed before there was that which could make light?

Light, scientifically, is a kind of visible electromagnetic wave which emits from certain sources (such as a light bulb) and which can then bounce off material objects, enabling us to see them. It is a factor – both literally and metaphorically – in perceiving, probing, and understanding the universe around us.

But light is not just about physically seeing. Light – in Hebrew "*Or*" or "*Ora*" – refers to the physical light: of things such as sun, moon, stars, luminescent jellyfish and fireflies. And it also refers to metaphysical, or spiritual light: *ner mitzvah*, the light of instruction; *or chayim*, the light of life; *or panim*, a bright cheerful face; *ora v'simcha*, light and joy.

It is the combination of both – of what we can perceive and understand physically with what we can perceive and understand spiritually – which leads to what we can call enlightenment. The non-physical light comes first in the Torah. Not, I think, because it is necessarily more important, but perhaps to help highlight that it is non-physical perception that helps bring meaning to the physical. With our eye we can perceive a flower; with our spirit we can find it beautiful. But not only can we find it beautiful, we can help make it beautiful. We are created *b'tzelem Elohim*, in God's image, and as such, have the ability to create, to bring light. We can create lights of teaching, joy, and healing (life). And we can also create, and expand upon, lights of perception in the world. We can combine the spiritual with the physical, helping to illuminate matters deep and broad for ourselves and others. We can bring the light.

Let there be light.

**HEALTH  
& SAFETY  
AT SZ pg. 3**



## VA'AD UPDATE

By DEBORAH LEVY



The Va'ad (SZ Board) is hard at work at this time of year developing our budget for fiscal year 2025, and we are wrangling with our growing needs and the challenge of increasing our revenue. We greatly appreciate all individual and community efforts and donations to support

our work. I hope you will keep this in mind as you consider your Rainbow Campaign contribution. We are optimistic that with our new ED Danny Shapiro at the helm, along with the work of Treasurer Marty Tilzer, the support of Jitasa (our relatively new accounting firm), the considered oversight of the Va'ad, and your continued generosity, we can reach a healthy budget next year.

We are grateful to our Health & Safety Committee for their work - including on grant-funding - to best ensure our safety. We are working to balance our need for safety and security with our desire to be

welcoming. We want to say "come in - all are welcome" and at the same time stay alert to concerns about safety.

We are continuing to explore disability rights, disability justice, Jewish values, the interconnectedness of social justice issues, and how that all translates to supporting accessibility and participation for all in our community, including through re-assessed and upgraded tech and other tools.

We are continuing our education and conversations on our community and individual relationships with Israel, the tragic situation in Israel and Gaza, and rising anti-semitism in the Bay Area and beyond. We also have Va'ad members representing us in working to protect the rights of transgender and gender non-conforming people. As a Va'ad, we grow closer and find comfort as we work together to address today's challenges and celebrate our successes, continuing our oversight and leadership.

So many congregational committees are

## Sha'ar Zahav

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Our Journey to Judaism program is supported by grants from the National Center to Encourage Judaism

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actively connecting and building community. Email [office@shaarzahav.org](mailto:office@shaarzahav.org) and ask to be added to one or several listservs, where you'll get the most updated info on meetings, events and social justice actions. For example, be sure you're on the listserv for the Social Action Committee and the John Lewis Voter Engagement Group to receive emails from Tirtza Pearl about how you can help get out the vote in the 2024 elections! Want to be in conversation with fellow congregants about Israel? There's a listserv

for that! Ask Danny ([danny@shaarzahav.org](mailto:danny@shaarzahav.org)) or me ([president@shaarzahav.org](mailto:president@shaarzahav.org)), or any of our dedicated Va'ad members (see the masthead), to learn more about groups where you may find connection.

## SHA'AR ZAHAV / EDUCATION

By RABBI Q



*SZ Welcomes Rabbi Q as our new educator!*

Shalom! I'm Lisa Levenberg (Rabbi Q), the new Director of Education here. I'm excited to become a part of this warm, vibrant community,

and especially Beit Sefer Phyllis Mintzer, SZ's Shabbat youth education program. I

had already heard so much about BSPM – it is known among local educators for its project-based learning and for its emergent curriculum, which brings together faculty expertise and student curiosity to actively construct understanding.

For example, last spring the students determined that they wanted to learn more about the stories of this community and how their own stories fit into it, so “Our Jewish Stories” became one of the three themes

*(continued on page 4)*

## Va'ad Members

Claudia Bernard, Barbara Cymrot, Meagan Fox, Brad Friedman, Franco Martinez, Josh Muller, Tirtza Pearl, Ruth Schoenbach, Alyss Weissglass

## Membership

Danny Shapiro  
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If you need help or can volunteer to help other Sha'ar Zahav members in need:  
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*(continued from page 3)*

for the current 2023-2024 school year. In January, longtime member and SZ history expert Ron Lezell gave a talk about the early days of the congregation and the school, then led us on a multigenerational walking tour of the Castro. We checked the camera shop, Twin Peaks, and other notable sites off on our low-tech paper maps. We were fascinated to learn that what is now Dolores Park was once the largest Jewish cemetery in the Bay Area! This history will provide a backdrop for the students' research into their own family names and stories. As their work takes shape, they will decide what type of culminating project would be the best way to present their learning to each other, their families, and the community. I can't wait to discover what's in store!

Speaking of curiosity, I'm usually asked,

"Why 'Rabbi Q?'" I like to be called "Rabbi" by students and community members, but the conversations about "Lisa" versus "Rabbi Lisa" versus "Rabbi Levenberg," and all the related issues around age, gender, formality, status, etc are both tired and tiring! So I'm trying out Rabbi Q instead. Plus, "Weird Barbie" was taken.

I welcome you to reach out to me at [educator@shaarzahav.org](mailto:educator@shaarzahav.org)

## SHA'AR ZAHAV WELCOME HOME!

### THE WELCOME HOME PROJECT

Responding to community need, Sha'ar Zahav has launched a 30-month pilot, the "Welcome Home Project." WHP will provide programming and support for the trans and gender non-conforming (TGNC) community; increased capacity for our Journey to Judaism (J2J) conversion program; and materials, resources and training to help synagogues and other Jewish institutions better serve transgender and gender non-conforming people. Rabbi Reuben Zellman, with their deep expertise in transgender and gender non-conforming identities, is developing and overseeing this program. You'll be hearing more from Rabbi Reuben about WHP in the coming months. The Welcome Home Project has been developed and funded in honor of our beloved members Paul J. Cohen z"l and Ray

K. Bernstein z"l, who cared deeply about Jewish inclusion. Funding for WHP comes in part from a generous legacy gift from Ray, donations from SZ congregants in Ray and Paul's memories, and generous seed funding from Menorah Park, where Paul was a longtime Board member and past Chair. Paul and Ray were so beloved in our community. The Welcome Home Project has been created from that love and will keep their names alive in our community.

Thank you to all who have contributed in memory of Paul and Ray and in support of the work of the Welcome Home Project. If you would like to help support their legacies and Welcome Home's work, please follow this link: <http://tinyurl.com/WHP2024>





Sha'ar Zahav welcomed three new employees in January. Danny Shapiro (he/him) is our new Executive Director. Rabbi Q (Lisa Levenberg, she/her) is now directing Beit Sefer Phyllis Mintzer. And Rabbi Reuben Zellman (he/they) is on board on Mondays and Wednesdays running our 30-month Welcome Home Project. You can read more about these exciting new team members on our website, and their contact info is in the masthead. If you see them at shul, be sure to say hello!

Thank you all for your patience during the few months we were low-staffed. And heartfelt thanks to those who helped fill the gaps: Kerasa Tsokas took on extra responsibilities in the office, and member Marla Allen worked to keep vital transactions going. Kay Magilavy volunteered as interim Director of Education for BSPM. And 10 SZ members devoted their time and thoughtfulness to our search processes. This transition would not have gone nearly as smoothly without all of you. *Toda raba* - many thanks!

## SHA'AR ZAHAV HEALTH &amp; SAFETY COMMITTEE

**HEALTH & SAFETY AT SZ**

By STEVE MAZER

In November 2022, SZ created a new Health & Safety (H&S) Committee to continue the work of our prior Reopening and Security Task Forces. H&S's goals: to ensure the health, safety, and security of our community by developing policies and procedures, evaluating and securing resources, and providing guidance and partnership to SZ leadership.

In its first year, H&S managed the evolution of SZ's health protocols as COVID moved from pandemic to endemic, including practices at High Holy Days and all events at 290 Dolores. We have been guided by public health advice and by the principle of *kol Yisrael aravim zeh b'zeh* – all Jews are responsible for one another. We also evaluated and began implementing options for First Aid/CPR; developed procedures for real-time decision-making in response to threats; reviewed greeter procedures; and established closer connections to national and local security-related organizations.

This work was put to the test after October

7, as Jewish communities everywhere have faced increased antisemitism and threats of violence. In response, we now have professional security plus volunteer greeters at 290 Dolores during scheduled services, public events, or Beit Sefer classes. Security will intervene if an incident occurs, but our greeters assess who should be admitted, in as warm and welcoming a way as possible, while keeping us safe. We're also applying for grants to fund upgrades to our security systems.

Health, safety, and security matters are complicated and rarely have one "right" answer; meeting our community's needs involves balancing many factors. H&S members take this responsibility seriously, and we appreciate the trust the community has placed in us. For more information about H&S contact [stevenmazer@gmail.com](mailto:stevenmazer@gmail.com); to join our amazing greeter crew, contact [sara.fay.haber@gmail.com](mailto:sara.fay.haber@gmail.com)



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SHA'AR ZAHAV MAZEL TOV

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## DECEMBER

**Annie Atura and Tyler Bushnell**

On the birth of Everly Lux Atura Bushnell

## JANUARY

**Daniel Loftus and Christopher Nguyen**

On the birth of their daughter

## FEBRUARY

**Lia Rawlings-Fein and family**

On Lia's bat mitzvah



**In Memoriam**

The congregation notes with sorrow the deaths of:

**NOVEMBER****Les Finkelstein**

Father of Lisa Finkelstein and father-in-law of Sarah Grams

**Suzanne Shepherd**

Stepmother of Eli Andrew Ramer

**DECEMBER****Edgar Carter Rust III**

Grandfather of Max Bograd

**André (Andy) Kukla**

Father of Rabbi Elliot Kukla

**Rhoda Diane Bernstein**

Mother of Ilana Bernstein

**Rebecca (Becky) Smith**

Partner of Nancy Levin

**David Levey**

Cousin of Mike Klayman

**JANUARY****Maureen Mulligan**

Friend of Nancy Kates

**Yuseli Lozada Ortiz**

Friend of Janis Portal

**Claire Isaacs Warhaftig**

Friend of Ron Edelman

**Brian Weiss**

Brother of Randy Weiss

**Cynthia Berger**

Mother of Andrew Berger

**Chuck Preisch**

Former father-in-law of Benny Lunine

**MARCH**

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**Alvin Baum**

**Norma Faini-Pick**

**Sanford Bernstein**

**MAY**

**Liselotte Huth**

**Eugene Bender**

**Jack Jacobs**

**Richard Inlander**

*(continued on page 10)*



**MAY (cont.)**

David Delroy

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Robert Coffman

James Perkins

David Loeb

Steve Goldstein

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Your contributions help us realize our commitment to building and maintaining a vibrant, living community for Sha'ar Zahav. A donation can be a meaningful way to honor friends or family, engagements, anniversaries, graduations, for special thanks, or to memorialize a loved one. Collectively, with your financial support, we continue to prosper, grow, and celebrate our future.

***We Want Your Photographs!***

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Please contact Lawrence Helman ([heytheresells@gmail.com](mailto:heytheresells@gmail.com)) or Robert Tat ([rob@roberttat.com](mailto:rob@roberttat.com)) for more information.

If you would like to join the team working on organizing our archival document materials, please contact Ron Lezell at [Lezell.ron@gmail.com](mailto:Lezell.ron@gmail.com).



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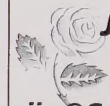
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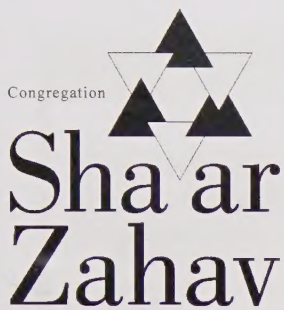
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Watch the weekly emails for details.



*Congregational Seder, Ft. Mason, 1993. Photo by Sam Thal.*